



*Art is the stored honey of the human soul,  
gathered on wings of misery and travail.*

--Theodore Dreiser  
"Life, Art and America"

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*Dreiser Studies* (ISSN 0896-6362) is published twice a year by the English Department at Indiana State University in Terre Haute. Annual subscriptions are \$5 for individuals and \$7 for libraries and institutions in North America, and \$14 for all annual subscriptions elsewhere. Single copies are \$4 each for North America \$7.50 elsewhere. Checks should be made payable to *Dreiser Studies*.

DS is dedicated to stimulating, coordinating, publishing, and reporting Dreiser scholarship. Unless otherwise stipulated, manuscripts should follow the MLA recommended style. Reviews are assigned; occasionally some editorial revision is necessary to meet space requirements.

All correspondence and subscriptions should be sent to: *Dreiser Studies*, English Department, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN 47809.

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# DREISER STUDIES

Volume 21, Number 2  
*Special Issue*

Fall 1990  
*The Brockport Conference*

Philip L. Gerber, Guest Editor

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# The Dreiser Doings at Brockport

Philip L. Gerber, Special Issue Guest Editor

The notion of doing something suitable to observe the ninetieth "birthday" of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, scheduled to arrive early in November 1990, first began to take shape in my mind during the autumn of 1989. The persistence of this novel, published reluctantly by Doubleday & Co. amid strife with its author, was something rather unique in American letters. Its survival, indeed its triumph, against all odds, throughout the nine decades of the twentieth century, as well as its ultimate placement among recognized American Classics, has made a dramatic story.

My original impulse had been to gather a small group of dedicated Dreiserians in Brockport to engage in an intimate discussion of *Sister Carrie* as a classic of the realist mode: how it reached--why it might be deserving of--that status. In fact, the half-dozen scholars I contacted at that time were asked to express their potential interest in a "mini-conference," perhaps an affair of a single day only, where such issues might be discussed in roundtable fashion, a session of frank give-and-take which might perhaps be teletaped for broader dissemination, but one whose major thrust would be to explore those aspects of *Sister Carrie* that provide its pronounced sense of contemporaneity and that have assured its endurance.

In this manner, the snowball was set rolling downhill, picking up along its way, as snowballs do, greater weight and magnitude. A morning-to-evening conference sounded fine--except for intervention of practical matters, especially that of time necessarily consumed by flights in and flights out. An overnight stay, either prior to or following the meeting seemed to be inevitable. And then, supposing that the overnight stay became fact, why not make use of that second day which would

then be made available to us? For a time, the possibility of a Thursday through Saturday meeting seemed feasible; but, reason prevailing, a Thursday through Friday schedule eventually was established. Timing as near to the November date of *Sister Carrie*'s publication was desirable, and consideration of our college calendar and the uncertainties of autumn weather in Upstate New York led to a choice of the weekend of October 25 and 26 as the dates to be preferred, all things considered. I requested those originally contacted to hold these dates free while I explored other areas of concern, particularly that of funding.

The SUNY Brockport campus is blessed with rather fine facilities, including a new Conference Center, but all of these--and including office help, correspondence, film rental, printing, publicity, coffee breaks, and the thousand and one other minutiae connected with holding a conference, regardless of size--cost dollars. Therefore, as winter approached, I made application to a number of potential funding agencies, not an area that I particularly enjoyed getting into, but one which had the salutary effect of forcing me to become considerably more explicit concerning the purpose and the plan for the conference.

Our campus had recently amended its "mission statement" to reflect a felt obligation regarding the multicultural aspects of American life, including issues of concern to women. This fact influenced my decision to guide the conference theme in those directions. Somewhat unconsciously I had already made steps toward such emphases, for among those originally polled were Yoshinobu Hakutani of Kent State University and Arun Prabha Mukherjee of York University in Toronto, born, respectively, in Japan and India. In both nations, the burgeoning interest in Dreiser studies clearly has had something unique to contribute to mainstream American considerations. The arrival on our Brockport faculty of Earleen De La Perrier suggested a third strand of interest: the black community. Black scholars have been notably invisible in considerations of Dreiser's work. Yet, I was--and I remain--convinced that his novels have much to say concerning the plight of these outsiders so long excluded from all participation in American affairs, not only on social or economic grounds but also on the basis of color. That Mukherjee and De La Perrier were scholars and also women delighted me, because the full integration of female scholars has lagged as well.

A dawning awareness of the fact that 1990 would mark also the sixty-fifth anniversary of the publication of Dreiser's second masterwork, *An American Tragedy*, led quite naturally to the notion of including within our purview some consideration of that novel. The emphasis upon women's issues now seemed a happier one, a common bond being apparent between the struggles of Carrie Meeber and those of Roberta Alden, both of them being working-class girls compelled to fend for themselves as best they could in the male-dominated industrialism of turn-of-the-century America. Gradually, a title for the conference emerged: "Working Girls," with the explanatory subtitle "Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* at Ninety." Now the die was cast.

My attendance at the American Literature Association's national conference in San Diego in May 1990 came about by virtue of my presidency of the Robert Frost Society, but of course I availed myself of the opportunity of becoming part of the audience at the session devoted to Dreiser, with major papers being delivered by Paul Orlov and Richard Lehan. That program served to acquaint me with a new woman Dreiserian, Miriam Gogol, who chaired the session impressively and who had ideas concerning the establishment of the formal Dreiser Society. Such a society has been something often considered but never acted upon by those who have always worked cooperatively, but informally, to foster the study of Dreiser. Determining to see that Gogol attend our conference in Brockport, I was delighted when she found it possible to accept an invitation to chair a major session of papers.

Rather soon I became aware of Miriam Gogol's efforts toward an edition of new essays, intended to reflect the widest and most innovative contemporary views of Dreiser's works, a volume which would aim to offer revisionist views of the canon, challenge the consensus of previous criticism, and provide new and unorthodox interpretations needed in the light of contemporary literary theory and cultural re-evaluation. The contributors, of whom Gogol would be one, would offer original interpretations of Dreiser's works from such disparate points of view as psychoanalysis, Bakhtin, and gender analysis. Times change, and our attitudes concerning major authors and their works must change with them. It is, indeed, one of the criteria for "major" status that an author should become capable of being newly relevant to suit new conditions. To be otherwise is

for "major" status that an author should become capable of being newly relevant to suit new conditions. To be otherwise is to sound the death knell. This volume, to be entitled *Theodore Dreiser: Beyond Naturalism*, promises exciting days to come for those interested in Dreiser.

Through Miriam Gogol, I came to know another member of the newer generation of Dreiser scholars and a prospective contributor of her book: Leonard Cassuto of Fordham University. As soon as I was able to contact this brilliant young scholar at his summer residence in San Francisco, I extracted a promise to attend our conference and present there his groundbreaking paper on the Lacanian psychoanalytical approach to Dreiser's fiction, a strand of criticism especially suited to Dreiser but one which in the past has all too often been ignored, perhaps because those of us in the "older" generation have generally felt ourselves better prepared to pursue other worthwhile approaches.

A chance remark made to Richard Dowell during the spring of 1990 led to his announcement in *Dreiser Studies* that a conference was planned for the fall in Brockport. This bit of serendipity led to contacts with other promising young scholars, including Nancy Warner Barrineau, Clare Eby, and Laura Hapke, all of whom ultimately contributed in various capacities to the enrichment of our conference offerings. Already scheduled were James L. W. West III, the eminent textual editor, and James Hutchisson of The Citadel, scheduled to produce an authoritative text for the Pennsylvania Edition of *The Financier*. Richard Dowell's agreement to chair another major session and Lawrence Hussman's assurance of providing introductions to the screenings of film versions of the Dreiser novels, which were now included in our plans, did much to round out our list of contributors.

The decision to enlarge the scope of the conference to accommodate *An American Tragedy* had brought to my mind the almost simultaneous knowledge that an appearance by Craig Brandon would be indispensable. In 1986, while vacationing in the Adirondacks near sites important to the 1906 Gillette-Brown murder case, the factual basis for the *Tragedy*, I had been pleasantly startled to read in the little local pennysaver that Mr. Brandon, then with the Utica newspapers, would present a lecture for summer visitors on the topic of his newly-published

Gillette had been apprehended). A sizable crowd of campers had gathered, and for them, as for me, Brandon's lecture was an eye-opener. This reporter, after being asked to work up an "anniversary piece" on the famous crime, had become sufficiently intrigued with what he found to spend a number of subsequent years in private investigation, tracking down on his own every possible clue to materials important to the case. The result, as I found at once upon reading his book, which by luck was being offered for sale at the library, constituted the most thorough study which might be imagined, replete with new data and embellished with rare photographs. If ever there were to be a definitive volume on the sources for *An American Tragedy*, this surely was it, completed and printed. I knew that, come what may, Brandon, who by 1990 had moved to the Albany *Times-Union*, would be a "must" for our conference.

Funding again. A Brandon appearance would require money, along with dollars already contemplated for printing, refreshments, and the like. In our local newspapers I read of a man whose boat had been swept down the nearby Niagara River and was rescued by police just before plunging over the Falls. I began to remark to people that I was getting to know rather precisely what that man must have felt as he was drawn inexorably nearer the brink. The autumn was arriving all too soon. I prayed for help, and again it came, not from the police but from the Events Committee of our School of Letters and Sciences, headed by Dean Robert J. Gemmett, who informed me that my conference, while I awaited word from other agencies, would be assured of at least the minimal funds essential to my going ahead with specific planning and commitments. Following that good news came more, word that the Dreiser conference had been selected by the Research Foundation of SUNY as one of the programs to be included in its "Conversations in the Disciplines" series for 1990-91. Now, happily, the program, might be taken off the "tentative" list.

However, most funding agencies, mine included, do not provide for refreshments, and from the beginning it had been my hope that a reception buffet on October 26 could be sponsored, one that would bring together in a social way not only participants and conference guests, but also interested faculty, students, and members of the community-at-large. A petition to the local chapter of our SUNY teachers' union, United

University Professionals, bore fruit in the form of an assurance of funds for this purpose. These funds later were augmented by others from Dr. Milton L. Cofield, Assistant to President John E. Van de Wetering, and from the campus Student Interaction Program, which fosters such affairs where students and faculty may mingle.

At the penultimate moment of program formation, two events occurred which added considerably to the diversity of the conference. The first came in the form of a response from Dr. Vera Dreiser to my invitation to attend. She sent regrets, pointing out that her planned surgery would prohibit travel. But she suggested an option. Would her daughter Tedi make a satisfactory replacement to represent the Dreiser family? Would Tedi serve? Does Toyota produce cars? At the Dreiser Centennial in Terre Haute in 1971 I had heard Tedi, a mere slip of a girl, perform in her recital of songs written by another of her grand uncles, Paul Dresser. Would she mind repeating this for us in Brockport? Of course! At about the same time as Tedi's gracious consent to "sing for her supper," it was announced that Richard Lingeman's second and final volume of biography, *Theodore Dreiser: A Life Journey*, would be published shortly before the conference was scheduled to occur. In part through the good offices of Tedi Dreiser Godard, Lingeman agreed to attend our function and, G. P. Putnam's supplying copies, to autograph both volumes of his biography for those wishing them.

By September it was possible to furnish program copy to the printer, following this schedule:

### **Thursday, October 25: *An American Tragedy***

Session One. Craig Brandon: Murder in the Adirondacks: the New York State Roots of *An American Tragedy*.

Session Two. Screening of *An American Tragedy*, the 1931 version directed by Josef Von Sternberg and starring Phillips Holmes (as Clyde), Sylvia Sydney (as Roberta) and Frances Dee (as Sondra).

Session Three. Video Screening of the 1951 version of *An American Tragedy (A Place in the Sun)*, directed by George Stevens and starring Montgomery Clift (in the Clyde role), Shelley Winters (in the Roberta role), and Elizabeth Taylor (in the Sondra role).

**Friday, October 16: *Sister Carrie***

Session Four. New Light on Dreiser. Chair: Miriam Gogol.

James L. W. West III. Editing Women In--and Out--of Dreiser's Novel.

Nancy Warner Barrineau. "Pioneers and Martyrs": The Ten-Cent Magazines and Dreiser's Working Girls.

Leonard Cassuto. "I Want, I Need--I Desire": Narcissism and Lacanian Aggressivity in *Sister Carrie*.

Response by: Richard Dowell, Clare Eby, Laura Hapke, and James Hutchisson.

Session Five. Cross Cultural Currents. Chair: Richard Dowell.

Earleen De La Perriere. *Sister Carrie*, Sisters in Sable Skin, and Testing the Wall: A Response from the Black Community.

Arun Prabha Mukherjee. *Sister Carrie* at Ninety: An Indian Response.

Yoshinobu Hakutani. *Sister Carrie* as an American Romance: A Japanese Response.

Response by: Clare Eby, Miriam Gogol, Laura Hapke, and James Hutchisson.

**Tedi Dreiser Godard:  
Paul Dresser Songs**

**Reception Buffet  
for Conference Participants,  
Guests, Faculty, and Students**

ession Six. Screening of *Carrie*, the 1952 film directed by William Wyler and starring Jennifer Jones as Carrie and Laurence Olivier as Hurstwood.

Hoping to locate a suitable logo for conference use, I recalled a woodcut of Theodore Dreiser which had been used frequently during the 1920s in advertisements and on book jackets by Horace Liveright. I applied to Henry Holt & Co., in whose 1928 volume *Contemporary American Authors* I had found what appeared to be the original placement of the woodcut. Finding no enabling records, Holt referred me to the Liveright Publishing Corporation, who in turn referred me to Harold Dies. In the name of the Dreiser Trust, Mr. Dies graciously granted permission



for use of this illustration on our materials. In this manner it was possible to achieve pictorial unity in material concerning the conference, including the *Program*, the *Guide to the Exhibit*, publicity flyers, and posters. We are grateful to Harold Dies and the Dreiser Trust for this permission. Should the Dreiser society become reality—as I hope and believe it will—perhaps the use of this same striking and easily-produced cut might be allowed as a permanent emblem for those involved cooperatively in Dreiser studies.

In advance of printing, it was felt highly appropriate to dedicate the conference to certain individuals who have made significant contributions to the study of Theodore Dreiser. Hence the official program distributed to attendees began with a citation congratulating:

Robert H. Elias, whose *Theodore Dreiser: An Apostle of Nature* (1949) set the professional tone

for Dreiser studies. Professor Elias was responsible for establishing the Dreiser Collection at the Library of Cornell University, with which he was long associated, and for endowing it with his valuable lifetime collection of books, manuscripts, correspondence, photographs, and miscellaneous Dreiser documents.

Neda M. Westlake, who for many years served as Curator of the Dreiser Collection at Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania. During her decades of curatorial service, the Dreiser Collection emerged as the single most important resource accessible to those interested in Dreiser's life and career. Every request, whether serious or frivolous, was met with courteous and prompt attention.

Vera Dreiser, niece of the novelist and closely associated with him during his lifetime, whose biography *My Uncle Theodore* (1976) was a major addition to Dreiser studies, providing data on the Dreiser family unobtainable elsewhere. Silently, she has helped and encouraged many.

To this trio of pioneers in Dreiser studies, an immense debt is owed by Dreiser scholars worldwide. For varying reasons, and to our regret, none of our dedicatees could attend the conference in person, but all sent their greetings to the group, and most of these were posted in the Conference Center. Via her daughter, Vera Dreiser sent a taped message which was played as the conference opened, thrilling all with her strong voice and kind message:

I am so sorry to miss participating in this momentous occasion, but please know that it could not be helped. I have been troubled with arthritis for some time, and last year decided to take advantage of the new technology in joint-replacement. I had such a successful left-knee replacement last year that I took my doctors advice and had the *right* one done September 14th, and am now recovering from that. Nothing less would have interfered with my being in Brockport today.

I can only imagine Uncle Theo's surprise at

the comments, events, and celebrations that have taken place since 1945. You will understand when I tell you that in September, 1944, while I was visiting him in California, he arranged for me to visit various studio heads, asking that they give my musical compositions some consideration. When I came home and told him of the very special welcome I had recieved when theyheard his name, he was genuinely amazed, even though he had recently closed a deal for a movie his brother Paul's life, *My Gal Sal*.

This was an example of his deeply rooted sense of inadequacy. He could not believe that anyone was really interested.

--And so, I wish you the most successful conference, and please remember that I am with you, and that I'm sure Uncle Theo's spirit is present in Brockport.

Greetings from other dedicatees and Dreiser scholars include the following:

I am always pleased when attention is called to Dreiser, whose reputation, I think, has never quite caught up with achievement, perhaps because it was not totally in sync with the high Modernist agenda. It looks like you will be addressing this and other questions come the 25th and 26th, and I wish you all the best of luck and regards.

Dick Lehan  
Los Angeles, CA

"Working Girls: SISTER CARRIE at Ninety" is a provocative title and turns one's mind back over the years. Certainly in 1900 Dreiser never thought that his literary collection would become a prized possession in a university. And certainly in 1950 when I first opened the cartons containing his manuscripts and correspondence in the rare book collection at Penn, I never thought that forty years later there would be so many of us whose lives and professional directions have been influenced by the writer that Bob Elias called The Apostle of Nature.

Neda Westlake  
Blue Bell, PA

As a Dreiser scholar myself, naturally I'm delighted about your Dreiser conference at Brockport, and only wish I were not too disabled to attend. It not only celebrates the ninetieth anniversary of *Sister Carrie*, but also marks the strong continuing interest in this most remarkable of American authors. I take my hat off to the Brockport conference.

W. A. Swanberg  
Southbury, CT

I am profoundly sorry not to be able to come. It sounds like a great conference [and] I extend my greetings and best wishes to all the Dreiserians who will be in attendance.

T. D. Nostwich  
Ames, IA

I'm delighted to know Dreiser scholarship prospers so well and to be reminded that *Carrie* has touched ninety. How right it is that *Carrie* receives notice. Modern feminism may well acknowledge Dreiser since long before it was fashionable, he understood woman's plight in the modern world. Because he had the capacity to listen to womankind when others did not, we now listen to him, and rejoice in his perspicacity. My joyous salutations to those *old* friends and *new* who gather now to pay him homage.

John McAleer  
Boston, MA

I recall that when I was working away over Dreiser's garage he occasionally came up to see what I was doing. The weather was warm, and he'd pad up the stairs barefoot, sit himself in the rocking chair he had there, and eye me with not a little amusement (even if it was mixed with pleasure), as though he were thinking, "So serious! and all about me!--It's a scream [a frequent Dreiser exclamation]!" As I recall those moments I am inclined to imagine his viewing your conference the same way--with both amusement and pleasure in the recognition you and others are according him. I

should add that I am pleased that my book is appearing in the exhibit. I also appreciate the way you've kept me informed of the program. I hope it goes well.

Bob Elias  
West Tisbury, MA

Events ancillary to the conference included an exhibit of nearly one hundred first-edition books in Drake Memorial Library. Drawn from the collection of Philip L. Gerber, these included most English-language editions of *Sister Carrie* issued between the original Doubleday printing of 1900, with what Dorothy Dudley called its "assassin's" red binding, and the 1990 volume 8 *Classic American Novels* (ed. David Madden), which groups Dreiser at last in company with works by the likes of Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, and James. Included as well were certain foreign editions of *Carrie*. A variety of editions of *An American Tragedy* were a part of the exhibit also, beginning with the original two-volume set of 1925 and coming up to date with contemporary paperback editions for students. A selection of other books important to Dreiser's career rounded out the exhibit. These included such works as *On Contemporary Literature* and *A Book of Prefaces* in which Stuart P. Sherman and H. L. Mencken faced each other at the inception of the great pro-and-con debate which subsequently consumed so much of literary twentieth century as concerns the appraisal of Dreiser's position in our literature; Robert H. Elias's seminal biography *Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature*; W. A. Swanberg's massive *Dreiser*; and Richard Lingeman's *Theodore Dreiser: At the Gates of the City, 1871-1907*. An illustrated *Guide to the Exhibit* was provided.

Midway through the conference, on October 25 at a dinner at the Harvester Park Inn in Brockport attended by conference participants and a number of guests, Miriam Gogol led a discussion pertinent to the formation of a Dreiser Society. Those present included a goodly number of persons currently interested in Dreiser studies:

Nancy Warner Barrineau  
Leonard Cassuto  
Earleen De La Perriere

Craig Brandon  
Robert Coltrane  
Richard W. Dowell

Lee Ann Draud  
Gene Gerber  
Joel Godard  
Miriam Gogol  
Yoshinobu Hakutani  
Laura Hapke  
James M. Hutchisson  
Arun Prabha Mukherjee  
Frederic E. Rusch  
Roger W. Smith  
Nobuyuki Uchino

Clare Eby  
Philip Gerber  
Tedi Dreiser Godard  
Fumiko Goto  
Michiko Hakutani  
Lawrence E. Hussman, Jr.  
Richard Lingeman  
Kiyohiko Murayana  
Julie Skelton  
Nahoko Uchino  
James L. W. West III

Gogol reviewed a number of compelling reasons--aside from the obvious one that Dreiser, as a major American author, deserves the formality--for establishing a society. Benefits likely to accrue to Dreiser studies generally as well as to individual society members through the concerted action that is made possible via a formal organization were pointed out. Not the least of these is the fact that the new and growing American Literature Association is constructed particularly to negotiate through established author societies which provide for continuity through officers. Gogol's remarks were received with great enthusiasm, including spontaneous offers of funds to aid in getting such a society across the difficulty between idea and reality. Notice was given of a further discussion to be held by interested parties during the Chicago MLA in December 1990. By the time these remarks see print, considerable progress may have been made.

Following the screening of *Carrie* on October 26, participants and guests gathered at the Gerber home in Brockport for a social evening, a time to unwind, to become better acquainted, and to exchange ideas before sleep and the morning rush for Rochester airport and homebound airplanes.

## Dreiser's (Bad) Luck with Hollywood

Lawrence E. Hussman, Jr.

"I believe," wrote Dreiser in 1932, "that motion pictures offer great possibilities as a medium of art. The pictorial effects on the screen are real, while those on the stage, especially outdoor scenery, are artificial. The camera can interpret as well as create by moving rapidly to any idea or place in the world. In that respect a movie is more like a novel than is the legitimate drama." But does Hollywood make much of its opportunity to create art? Dreiser thought not, producers being businessmen, not artists, considerably more interested in box-office receipts, which appeared to require that film be brought down to the standards of intelligence and morality evinced within the unenlightened masses. He was never content with what Hollywood did with his novels despite his vociferous protests, and no case was more distressing to him than the first attempt at a Dreiser film adaptation, the 1931 version of An American Tragedy.

After his futile effort to have the movie suppressed, Dreiser put his despair into words:

When I tried, last July, to restrain Paramount from showing the movie of my book, An American Tragedy, on the ground that by not creating the inevitability of circumstances influencing Clyde, a not evil-hearted boy, they had reduced the psychology of my book so as to make it a cheap murder story, I lost the case. But when I read the court's decision, a light broke upon me. For said the learned court:

"The Producer must [emphasis mine] give consideration to the fact that the great majority of the people composing the audience before which the picture will be presented, will be more interested that justice prevail over wrongdoing than that the inevitability of Clyde's end clearly appear."

*Such being the case, that spells the end of art,  
does it not? ("The Real Sins of Hollywood,"  
Liberty 11 June 1932: 6)*

*Three Dreiser film adaptations were screened at the conference in Brockport, each introduced by Lawrence E. Hussman, Jr., of Wright State University. Hussman, who will provide an essay on Dreiser and film for Miriam Gogol's Theodore Dreiser: Beyond Naturalism, has been best known for his volume Dreiser and His Fiction: A Twentieth Century Quest (1983). Presented here are summaries of the introductions which he provided for the film screenings. In each case, Hussman touches upon three points of relevance: (1) Was there any real or implied censorship involved with the making of the film? (2) Was each film a successful adaptation that exhibited faithfulness to the novel? (3) How did each film treat women?*

#### *An American Tragedy (1931)*

Josef von Sternberg's version was set in the context of Eisenstein's earlier *An American Tragedy* film scenario which had been turned down by Paramount. Eisenstein had planned to shoot the adaptation in such a way as to absolve Clyde of any guilt and transfer responsibility to the American capitalist system. Sternberg's approved version found Clyde unquestionably guilty by eliminating much of the extenuating background as it appears in Book One of the novel, directing the actor who played Clyde to assume an air of criminality, stacking the courtroom scenes in favor of the prosecution, etc.; Sternberg's guilty verdict can be said to be faithful to the novel in the sense that Dreiser leaves the matter of Clyde's extent of guilt up to the reader, but the film utterly ignores the tortured ambiguity and ambivalence about Clyde's moral responsibility that makes the novel great literature. Moreover, there are other aspects of the film that justify Robert Penn Warren's charge of "total confusion." One of these aspects is Sternberg's treatment of the women characters in the film, who, with the except of Roberta Alden, come across as mindless flirts far more sexually driven than Clyde.

### *Place in the Sun* (1951)

A species of self-censorship played a role in the production. George Stevens had planned a reasonably faithful adaptation, but the looming presence of the House UnAmerican Committee caused a Niagara of watering down to occur. What emerged on film was primarily a love story between George Eastman/Clyde (Montgomery Clift) and Angela Vickers/Sondra Elizabeth Taylor). After building sympathy for George throughout the film (by downplaying his criminal intent, by photographing the drowning from a distance, by stacking courtroom scenes in favor of the defense, etc.) Stevens suddenly reverses course once George is convicted. He introduces Reverend McMillan to pronounce George guilty, a verdict with which the audience is clearly prompted to agree. Thus, the film finally becomes as incoherent and devoid of the novel's in-depth inquiry into moral responsibility as Sternberg's version. The treatment of women in *A Place in the Sun* would hardly please the least assertive feminist. Working girls as represented by Alice Tripp/Roberta (Shelley Winters) are portrayed as mindless rumps doomed to languish in the shadow of the upper class impossible shes of this world.

### *Carrie* (1952)

William Wyler's film version of *Sister Carrie* was also watered down thanks to the fear of the House UnAmerican Activities Committee. Radical charges were made in Carrie's character. Little of the independence and none of the conflict within the novel's heroine got transferred to the screen. Instead, Carrie comes across as a devoted wife and almost mother, far closer to Dreiser's Jennie Gerhardt. The darkly filmed interiors which dominate also fail to bring either Chicago or New York alive as the novel does so strikingly. The movie, thanks to Wyler's success in obtaining Lawrence Olivier for the role of Hurstwood, tends to concentrate more on the bar manager than his mistress. One short scene in which Carrie is injured while working a machine at a Chicago sweat shop gives audiences a glimmer of insight into the travails of working girls. This scene, however, becomes the catalyst for getting Carrie out of the work world and into romantic involvements rather than for an expression of social outrage at factory conditions.

## New Light on Dreiser: A Summary of Session Four

*The fourth session of the "Working Girls" conference featured presentations by James L. W. West III of The Pennsylvania State University, one of our most eminent textual scholars, who was largely responsible for the Pennsylvania Edition of Sister Carrie; Nancy Warner Barrineau of the Department of Communicative Arts at Pembroke State University, whose dissertation, "Journalism in the 1980's: The Origins of Theodore Dreiser's Fiction," was a beginning step toward the intensive study of Dreiser's work on Ev'ry Month; and Leonard Cassuto, a new and welcome voice in Dreiser studies, who holds a 1989 doctorate from Harvard and is currently on the faculty of Fordham University.*

*Professor West opened the session with an illustrated lecture entitled "Editing Women In--and Out--of Dreiser's Novels." Working largely from slides of manuscript and typescript pages of Dreiser's novels, he fascinated his audience with specific examples of deletions which had the cumulative effect of making heroines such as Carrie Meeber and Jennie Gerhardt considerably less sexual--and therefore less totally recognizable as women--than they were in his original conceptions.*

*Nancy Barrineau's paper, "The Predicament of Women: Dreiser's Carrie," was based on an essay she has submitted for publication entitled "'Pioneers and Martyrs': The Ten-Cent Magazines and Dreiser's 'Working Girls.'" In her essay, Barrineau examines issues raised by Dreiser in Sister Carrie and Jennie Gerhardt about the place working class women from poorly established immigrant families are to occupy in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America in a society which was increasingly urbanized and mechanized. She asserts that his search for a new definition of women's role was in large part fueled by his experience as editor of Ev'ry Month.*

*Leonard Cassuto closed the fourth session by delivering an excerpt from an essay that will appear in Miriam Gogol's*

selection, *Theodore Dreiser: Beyond Naturalism*. Using the title "Carrie, Hurstwood, and Jacques Lacan" for his presentation, Cassuto sought to connect Dreiser's nonteleological worldview to the psychological complexities of his protagonists. Wanting to determine why these characters react to environment and chance as they do, he identified repetition-compulsion and the death drive as two key means by which Dreiser portrays his character's conflicted desires. The psychoanalysis of Lacan is best suited for this task, Cassuto believed, because of Lacan's focus on the ego as the sea of equivocal conflict and alienation.

# Sister Carrie, Sisters in Sable Skin, and Gestures of Exclusion

Earleen De La Perriere

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The difficulties in the comparison of a fictional character with real figures moving with an actual milieu are obvious. Because "Sister Carrie" exists only in fiction, we share her thoughts, her problems, her failures, her strengths and weaknesses, her public image and her private moments. Our probing is limited only by the logical demands of the narrative and the author's disclosure choices. But to employ the phenomenological world and living women as a basis alters the comparison mainly because of limits on self-disclosure and the right to privacy. For social and other reasons, polite limits restrict public concessions of weakness or failure; while private thoughts, desires, unfulfilled dreams, unmet needs and so forth remain in the private domain. The advantages from the comparison, however, should not be disparaged. By examining Sister Carrie within the context of people living in her day, perhaps we can gain a greater appreciation for the actuality of her era and its culture, the size of struggles and resulting accomplishments, and the energy and efforts which were required in order to succeed.

"What am I to do?" Many times throughout the novel, the passive, dependent, good-looking, and diminutive Carrie

poses this question. Indeed, her alternatives are drastically limited, given nineteenth-century circumstances and the unattainable social position she wanted. Like many other newcomers to Chicago, she felt herself excluded, held outside that "wall" within which lay wealth, status, and happiness. With only her large, expressive eyes and a certain appeal to men, Carrie has neither trade nor commercial skills to meet the demands of the marketplace. But let's consider specific options: (a) Carrie could have chosen a rural life in Wisconsin, a life she left in favor of Chicago; (b) she could have lengthened her stay at home long enough to become more competitive with education or commercial skills demanded in Chicago; (c) she could have chosen, as her sister did, to marry and struggle as a family to move up in social class. Although she accomplished celebrity status in her stage career, that did not afford the satisfaction Carrie wanted. For all her passivity, all her easy acceptance of offers from Drouet and Hurstwood, all her stage success, she never felt that she had fully overcome exclusion, being "turned by the wall."

Although employers were seeking migration of people with trades suitable for the expanding Industrial Age, we would be negligent if we did not recall that many migrants and immigrants were moving to (and frequently through) Chicago as a means of escaping some intolerable economic or social condition. Dreiser tells us that "It was August 1889" and that Caroline Meeber "boarded the afternoon train for Chicago" with a box lunch, a few small pieces of luggage, four dollars, and the address of her sister Minnie. (But we need to remember also that Carrie may well have been considerably better off than many of her fellow passengers on that train.)

Dreiser was aware of much, very much concerning the burgeoning city of Chicago. But he is not wholly comprehensive in his picture. St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Clayton's comprehensive work *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* gives us graphs which reflect the size of groups migrating to Chicago at the turn of the century. It shows that the proportion of Negroes went from one percent to only two percent between 1890 and 1900, advancing another single percent during the first decade of the twentieth century. Their proportional size was negligible enough to be insignificant to the novel and may help to explain the absence of black faces except

perhaps in subordinate and "invisible" capacities such as domestic servants, restaurant waiters, or (as was probable on the train which Carrie and Hurstwood take to Montreal) as Pullman porters. A Negro man might aspire to be a porter if he possessed a striking appearance, social graces, and an alert mind, just as Carrie, in different circumstances, is able to breach the wall excluding her from the theatrical world because of personal qualities which appeal, a certain intangible something which compensates for her being only "half-equipped."

Rather than admit to failure in Chicago, face her return home to a village in Wisconsin, and try again next summer as her sister suggests, with neither a question nor forethought Carrie follows Drouet's suggest that she live with him in an apartment where he pays the rent and passes her off as his sister. Although he presumes that they will marry at some future time, Carrie goes along with this deception without apparent conviction as to it being the right or proper thing to do while equally without conviction that her actions should follow her own will instead of someone else's. "It must be remembered that reason had little part in this. . . . In fine raiment and elegant surroundings, men seemed to be contented. Hence, she drew near these things" (463).

Because Carrie is uncomfortable in her "arrangement of convenience" with Drouet, she is amenable to Hurstwood's idea to leave with him (enhanced by his prevarication that he would take her to Drouet, who supposedly had been hurt in an accident). In Canada Hurstwood and Carrie go through a marriage ceremony with Hurstwood using an assumed name. In effect, Carrie is not married at all. Only after Hurstwood's decline does she come to admit her awareness of the illegitimacy of their marriage. Although she possesses innate talents which she parlays into a successful stage career, she is unaware of them until the vagary of fate forces her to explore her own potential. Then her talent takes her into fame and fortune. But she remains discontent regarding marriage.

Hurstwood, a manager, is, at one crucial time for Carrie, careless and uncertain with business. He suffers the dire consequences of having absconded with ten thousand dollars belonging to his employers. This misfortune becomes Carrie's misfortune as long as he is in command of her life. Carrie introduces him as her husband to the enviable Mrs. Vance, a social climb-

er, who later ignores Carrie when she sees Hurstwood in tattered clothing, a visible state of financial decline. This response of Mrs. Vance indicates that Carrie can rise socially only according to the level that Hurstwood can attain. Carrie finds Hurstwood to be burdensome and moves away from him. He eventually runs completely out of money and is reduced to begging on the street for the price of a warm and cheap place to sleep.

Eventually Hurstwood reads of Carrie's success while he is in his state of decline. Remembering his past, plush-covered world, he thinks, "Ah she [is] in the walled city now! Its splendid gates had opened, admitting her from a cold, dreary outside." Hurstwood quietly sleeps in the hotel room without touching fire to the gaslight jet—a suicide. At this nadir, ironically, we find that Carrie is described as no longer being "poor, unsophisticated, emotional; responding with desire to everything most lovely in life, yet finding herself turned as by a wall," still excluded from her heart's desire.

The metaphor of the wall contains a network of people whose membership is restricted by social status, privilege, physical appearance, and behavior. The very urbane image is one of a secure woman, comfortable in the knowledge that she need not be concerned about the harshness of life. Those concerns are kept at bay, outside her home. There is the safety of a wall holding back the coarseness without, the rawness, the chaos of uncertainty. It may go without saying that there is a host of other real or imagined fears limited only by the stretch of the imagination.

On the other hand, this wall and Carrie's fears served as severe restrictions on her ability to become aware of her own talents, potential, and opportunities. In the reality outside the novel, we find that there were accommodations in place where a young single woman could live if she had a job. There were homes in Chicago where working girls could afford the room and board and maintain a safe place to live. The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) is a case in point. Carrie did not consider nor take advantage of her possible resources in the thriving metropolis.

Another step into the actuality of the milieu takes us into the conditions, options and accomplishments of a few Sisters in Sable Skin. According to Fannie Barrier Williams's obser-

ventions, the comparative accomplishments of black women during that day must be seen as prodigious credits gained in spite of obstacles. They were accomplishments gained even in the face of hostile attitudes, the principle of exclusion working even more powerfully upon them than upon Carrie, whose white skin was a part of her enablement:

Black women were thwarted by exclusion not only from professions like the ministry, but also from employment even in the comparatively restricted areas open to white women. "It is almost literally true," Fannie Barrier Williams reported as the century was ending, that "except teaching in colored schools and menial work, colored women can find no employment in this free America." This condition of affairs prompted her to ask: "Are these women not as thoroughly American in all the circumstances of citizenship as the best citizens of our country?" Whites, she inferred, feared social equality as the ultimate danger, which explained discrimination against black women. (Bogin and Loewenberg 28)

Carrie's African-American counterparts in the urban setting had to be strong in both body and mind. As Sojourner Truth tenderly renders her experience in motherhood—she gave birth to thirteen children and knew the tears of a mother's grief with each child that was torn from her arms and sold off to slavery—she could bear the lash, could work just like a man. While Carrie could ask, "What are we to do?" and set efforts in motion toward a viable solution, Fannie Barrier had to be more resourceful and resort to her own intelligence for a viable solution.

Sojourner Truth gave the most memorable depiction of conditions and protection. She had never been protected nor cared for by a man, as Carrie was, repeatedly. She was born a slave in the state of New York. She lived through many very severe emotional experiences; she was sold away from both parents while still a child. "She knew heavy farm work, cruel masters, the ripping away of some of her children." She took her own freedom a year before New York's laws abolished slavery. She was undaunted and there is no report of her having any mental depression. Her strength might shock the protected

woman securely within the wall of exclusion. She said:

That man over there says women need to be helped  
into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have  
the best places everywhere. Nobody ever helps me  
into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me  
any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me!  
Look at my arm! I ploughed, and planted, and  
gathered into barns, and no man could head me?  
And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and  
eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear  
the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have  
borne thirteen children, and seen them most all sold  
off to slavery, and when I cried out with my  
mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't  
I a woman?

The independence and indomitability of Sojourner Truth in the late nineteenth century is still today a model of feminine strength that few other women can match. Certainly none living within the confinement of the wall of protection will ever discover the same full extent of their potential.

Taking a less known example of the forced autonomy of the black woman, let's consider the fate of Fannie Barrier Williams. Slightly before Carrie's time an African-American woman left the village of Brockport, went to a conservatory of music, became an accomplished pianist, taught in Washington, D. C., and enjoyed a measure of professional success before she married a prominent lawyer. She became an eponym—in Buxton, Iowa, a chapter of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) took the name Fannie Barrier Williams Club.

. . . These African-American women depict choices among options with a range of accomplishments. Sojourner Truth was self-reliant, autonomous, and independent, never having the protection of a man, as Carrie has. She was also one to take advantage of circumstances in a proactive way. Fannie Barrier Williams was educated to a professional level before she left her parents. On her own she was intellectually resourceful in tough situations. One female member of my own family, the Burdens, of Michigan, chose a path more similar to Carrie's. She left Ohio at about the same time as Carrie and migrated to Chicago. Great-aunt Mercedes Burden's adventures is in con-

tradistinction with Carrie's adventure. Essentially, Miss Burden chose to marry a porter on the Canadian Railroad and educated their daughter, who became a dentist in Chicago. A relative of our extended family, from the same generation as Sister Carrie, also visited Chicago. She shows, for example, that an occasional black woman did find an opportunity to market her skills. Carolyn "Carrie" Hayes graduated from Ypsilanti High School in 1902 and graduated from Cleary Business College in 1903. She typifies the experience that Sister Carrie might have had if she had first gained some marketable skill before migrating to Chicago. Carrie Hayes became a secretary in Detroit. Michigan's Governor Ferris selected her to be a delegate to the national commemoration of Fifty Years of Freedom celebrated in Chicago in 1915. Later, Carrie Hayes married Mr. Edgar Bow and moved to Ithaca, New York, where they worked together and were able to multiply their resources—they rented housing to college students.

Studies of women's emotional and psychological adjustment to the impact of city life show us that, along with the tensions that accompanied urbanization and modernization, stereotypical images began to flourish that portrayed citified, sophisticated women not under the protection of a man. In other words, these women were not within the safety of the protective/restrictive wall mentioned earlier. These women felt no arm of protection around them; they had no wise, comforting solution offered them when they might ask, like Carrie, "What am I to do?" Too often the state of being free and independent became grounds for suspicion of being immoral. Dreiser, a man of his time, warns on the first page of his novel that serious risk of morality is involved in going to a large city: "When a girl leaves her home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse." Carrie, whose understanding of money is "something everybody has and I must get," wants to stay in Chicago. Drouet, who "loved to make advances to women, to have them succumb to his charms . . . because his inborn desire urged him to that as a chief delight," seduces Carrie with a dinner and two ten-dollar bills, a warm new jacket and a place to stay. Carrie accepts and on her first night of sleeping with Drouet, her sister, Minnie, has a nightmare in which she and Carrie were before an old coal

mine. "There was a deep pit, into which they were looking . . . they could see the curious wet stones far down where the wall disappeared in vague shadows. An old basket, used for descending, was hanging there, fastened by a worn rope." Minnie refused to get in, but Carrie did, and she descended into the dark pit until the shadow swallowed her "completely." Here Dreiser suggests Carrie's moral fall.

In Carrie we see a very passive creature, a girl who was kept by first one man and then another until she was able to get the right "break" and be given a place in a theatrical chorus line.

From the chorus line she was able to gain increasingly greater success on the stage. But her African-American counterpart had to be stronger in both body and mind; for her the wall of exclusion was not so easily breached.

NOTE: In making these distinctions between Carrie and real black women of the 1890's, this paper has scarcely alluded to the terrorizing racial atrocities where mobs would awaken a sleeping family and, with impunity, brutally drag out one of the parents--father or even mother--to be so tortured that death might come as a relief. It is notable that Dreiser, in "Nigger Jeff," was one of the few authors to put his pen against this practice.

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## Sister Carrie at Ninety: An Indian Response

Arun P. Mukherjee

*Predictably an important voice among our newer Dreiserians, Arun P. Mukherjee, now with York University in Toronto, balances youthful years in Indiana with an extended later residence in North America. Dreiser scholars probably know her best through her Gospel of Wealth in the American Novel: The Rhetoric of Dreiser (1987). The following paper was delivered in Brockport on 26 October 1990.*

*Sister Carrie* turned ninety this year. And while I rejoice in the book's having withstood the test of time despite all the condescension heaped on it through the entire ninety years of its existence, there is nothing more I would like than for it to have become irrelevant and outdated. I would have liked it better if I could teach this American classic as a thing of the past, as something that described a phase long since consigned to the annals of history. But *Sister Carrie* seems so uncannily to be about our own day and age. For in Toronto the Good, as my city is sometimes called because of its Puritanic past, there are a hundred thousand human beings who wander homeless, making their beds on hot air vents and stairwells of office buildings. One million Canadian children, that is, one out of every six, live in poverty. Your statistics are no different either.

However, the image of North America that I grew up with in the fifties and the sixties was as exaggerated as the nineteenth century Chinese descriptions of it as the Golden Mountain. Born eleven months and seven days before Indian's independence, I grew up in a country where two major

ideologies of our time were warring for supremacy. Their weapons were free, or ridiculously cheap, magazines, calendars, books, libraries and scholarships for study abroad. So I grew up with calendars on my family's living room walls of happy-looking Americans and happy-looking Russians, photographed against idyllic landscapes. Now, the Russian photographs were no match to the American ones in terms of their color reproduction and quality of paper. And so, I was won over to the American way very early in my life. I would often stand in front of these charmed landscapes, very much like Carrie standing before the houses of the rich, and dream of living amid such paradisaical surroundings someday. And the more I looked at these "ambassadors,"<sup>1</sup> the more dissatisfied I became with my own petty bourgeois life in a rather drab small town in central India, even though, looking back, I can see that it wasn't really such a bad life.

This interpellation of my consciousness with manufactured images of America that told less than half the truth—is not a unique story. Nor can the interpellation of the consciousness of millions of people across the globe be brushed aside as an unfortunate but unavoidable side effect of the technological superiority of American photo-journalism, films, and television. On the contrary, these images are deliberately manufactured and deliberately disseminated. For example, it was recently reported in the newspapers that the American government was buying up unsold issues of magazines like *Glamour* and *Cosmopolitan* and shipping them to Poland so that the Polish people could see the standard of living enjoyed by Americans. Of course, these magazines won't tell them, as the photographs of childhood didn't tell me, that not all Americans enjoy such luxury.

I did not find out about those Americans absent from these manufactured images until I myself arrived in North America, in 1971. I arrived on a campus where I heard, for the first time, about the Civil Rights Movement, the American Indian Movement and the Feminist Movement. Of course, I did not hear of these things in the Department of English but in the highly politicized student press of the time. In fact, I was highly surprised to learn that the United States had people of other colors besides white. For the images in the American calendars of my childhood had all been of white people. Once again, this

construction on my part of the United States as a nation composed entirely of white Europeans is, by no means my individual delusions, but a worldwide one.<sup>2</sup>

My first curricular exposure to the United States occurred in 1965, when I took advantage of the newly introduced option of taking a graduate course in American literature. The sixties were the decade of the introduction of American Studies in Indian universities, and our departmental library got a sackful of books in American literature, thanks to the largesse of the Fulbright Foundation and the United States Educational Foundation. Plus, some of our faculty members went to the United States to equip themselves to teach us.

Dreiser was not on our curriculum. It was a highly selective curriculum composed in the main of the writers who have come to be known as the American Renaissance, thanks to F. O. Matthiessen's famous book. The others included on our list were Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, Robert Frost and T. S. Eliot. Although Faulkner's *Sound and Fury* was on the curriculum, the book was never taught. I tried to read it for myself, but found it too difficult to comprehend and so did not venture beyond the first few pages.

This canon of American literature was presented to us without any preliminary lectures on American history, politics, and social institutions. Since we had no prior knowledge about the United States whatsoever, our high school and undergraduate curriculum being totally devoid of anything American, we needed such lectures badly. However, those were the days of New Criticism orthodoxy, and this highly selective curriculum, taught in a vacuum, only reinforced my image of the idyllic America I had imbibed from the calendars. The images of Thoreau's *Walden*, for instance, mingled seamlessly in my mind with the bucolic images of the American farmhouse on the calendar.

This American literature curriculum, along with the English literature curriculum, taught in complete isolation from the social contexts from which these literatures emerge, left an impression on me of literature being something that was too complex to comprehend fully. I passed my examinations, like others, with help from Indian versions of *Coles Notes*, but without ever grasping, or liking, any of the books the Indian curriculum designers had chosen for me to read. I did like *The*

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, but my background knowledge was so poor that I liked it for the wrong reasons. For example, I did not really comprehend that Jim was an African-American, that "nigger" was a racial slur, and that a slave was not merely another word for a servant.

I have often wondered about this canon of American literature. In fact I was forced to teach a very similar course as late as 1985 at a major Canadian university, although I deconstructed it by telling my students about its "absences" and about my lack of power as a part-time instructor to change it. My most recent perusal of Canadian and Indiana curricula in American literature indicates that not much has changed since I took my graduate course in 1965. Dreiser is not on those courses. Nor are African-American or Native Americans or Asian-Americans, except for a rare exception here and there.

While the canon of American literature *has* broadened within the United States itself, under pressure from previous disenfranchised communities, the canon outside the United States has not yet registered these seismic changes. As far as Indian is concerned, the situation is worse since the Indian students and faculty do not even have the benefit of the knowledge of the contradictions between images and reality that the Canadian students do. The Indian curricula is written in stone, and the publications in Indian journals indicate to me that there is no debate going on among teachers of English and American literature in India about canon formation and about the inclusions and exclusions that a canon employs.<sup>3</sup>

The Indian canon of American literature is exclusionary, not only in its selection, but also in terms of what kind of attention is paid to the writers chosen for study. The chosen writers are contextualized in terms of the historical, social, and political specificities from which their work emerges but in terms of "an archetypal human situation common to all cultures."<sup>4</sup> The critic's job, apparently, is to look for "enduring values," for "the grand themes that can give literature the epic quality it deserves."<sup>5</sup> This kind of criticism compares the "great works" of Indian literature and American literature in order to make vast universalist generalizations about the quintessentially "American" and quintessentially "Indian":

One is inclined to believe from the evidence of literary works, that the American image of man is

determined by active tragic self-transcendence, whereas the corresponding Indian image is controlled by the passive dynamic of self-sublimation into a cosmic consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

This kind of criticism, in its creation of a unitary American and a unitary Indian consciousness, which are endlessly compared and contrasted by references to random passages in the canonized writers is totally devoid of any connections with history as it is lived by human beings divided along the lines of gender, race, and class. In the hands of this universalistic criticism, Jay Gatsby is not the product of the age of the Robber Barons, but an exemplum of the eternal human: "Gatsby swims against the current, exerting the climactic energy of his all too human will against the primitive, pre-conscious, amoral vitalities of the universe."<sup>7</sup> The universalist critic is also blind to the racist and colonialist sub-text of Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*: "The corrupted soul fears to bear the consequences of its own action. At the same time the human soul is heir to the crimes and virtues of its ancestors, and to the ignorance and stupidity of the ages . . . . The theme of alienation from the land is joined to the lure and hostility of the sea. A kind of symbolism helps O'Neill in reinterpreting and reevaluating the human situation."<sup>8</sup>

I became acquainted with American literature within such theoretical frames. Little wonder, then, that I arrived in Canada, in 1971, without ever having heard of the Civil Rights Movement. That and the rest of the tortured history of the United States were not relevant, according to the shapers of American Studies in India, to the study of the "great works" of literature.

As a non-white Indo-Canadian woman, I have become very suspicious of this abstract, apolitical "human situation" that never acknowledges the dehumanization of disenfranchised men and women and its own well-fed privilege. I am sick and tired of racist, sexist, and classist works being rammed down my throat in the name of "enduring values" and the "human condition." And I am sick and tired of racist, sexist, and classist Indian critics celebrating the "Boston Brahmins" and their attraction to Hinduism without ever looking at the unequalitarian aspects of Hinduism. It is all fine to be talking about the soul

and eternal bliss, but I would like us also to talk about the here and now and the different "situations" human beings occupy in it.

It is a matter of great regret for me that Indian critics have been so preoccupied with the eternal and the cosmic that they have shown little interest in understanding the material conditions of the world we live in. Worlds like "capitalism," "racism," "imperialism" and "sexism" seldom seem to figure in their discourse. And it stands to reason, then, that writers who deal with such subject matter are excluded from it.

This exclusionary framework, however, is not even home-grown, but it was imported lock, stock and barrel. A major Indian Americanist tells us that "In analyzing works of art, in determining the pattern of historical sequence and progression, the historians of Indo-Anglian literature will have to raise the same questions, face the same situations, and evolve the same--or similar--strategies as the historians of American literature." How lucky for us that they have already done the ground work for us! We need not look beyond the "categories such as isolation and alienation, innocence and experience, the American Adam, the Power of Blackness."<sup>9</sup>

This is the kind of critical discourse that has no room for the great realists of both American and Indian literature who were concerned with writing about the inequities of the social system with the intent of helping to bring about a better system. And when it does acknowledge them, it is only to appropriate and assimilate their work in the universalist vocabulary of "the human condition."<sup>10</sup> The steamroller of this vocabulary grinds down all traces of the local and the particular, leaving us with a residue that Soyinka define as "a universal-humanoid abstraction."<sup>11</sup> Its claim to speak for all time and all places and all humans, of course, is a cover for its cowardice to acknowledge that the relations between human beings are conflictual because of unfairness and injustice. The blindness of this discourse to the fact that some of us humans are dying from overeating while others from not getting enough can only be called obscene.

The creators of this discourse determined that, when I took my very first American literature course, neither Dreiser nor anyone remotely realist would be on it. And they also determined that whatever they taught me in the name of American literature would have nothing to do with the realities of that

society, but instead with Soyinka's "universal humanoid abstraction." And so I read this curriculum with a great sense of boredom and incomprehension. I was intelligent and knew how to write in the accepted idiom, and so I would get good grades, but my heart was not in it. I have narrated in my book *The Gospel of Wealth* how I went through a similar experience during graduate school in Canada, churning out endless papers on symbolic patterns and quest and archetypes. I hated the exercise for its meaninglessness and continued in it only because I did not feel that I had another option.<sup>12</sup>

My encounter with Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, in my third year of Graduate School in Toronto, in the twenty-eighth year of my life, was a turning point in my intellectual career. Although Dreiser was not in the regulation American literature course that I have already described, I was introduced to him in a course called "City in the Modern Novel," being given by a professor with British working-class origins. I will never forget the experience of my first reading of *Sister Carrie*. It was my first encounter with characters who work in factories, who go on strikes, who wander on the streets, dazed, ill-dressed and hungry. The subject matter, accompanied by Dreiser's understated, matter-of-fact style, made me experience, for the first time, the relevance and power of literature. It was, I felt, about the realities of the world that I lived in. I was hooked on Dreiser and I took out all his novels from the library and read them.

My oppositional consciousness was born when I began to read the critical work on Dreiser. No other major American writer has been the subject of such snooty putdowns as Dreiser. His first major critic, Robert H. Elias, set the trend when he commented that Dreiser "appears to have been the victim of contradictions that any high school graduate should know enough to avoid."<sup>13</sup> F. O. Matthiessen, cognizant as he is of Dreiser's power, considers him a "primitive," "scarcely a conscious artist at all when he set out to write *Sister Carrie*."<sup>14</sup> Robert Penn Warren finds him inferior to Proust because he remained on the level of the "sociological," unlike Proust who gave more importance to the "aesthetic dimension."<sup>15</sup> And how little things have changed in terms of critical climate is evidenced from Harold Bloom's editorial comments in his "Introduction" to an anthology of critical essays on *An American*

*Tragedy*. Informing us that "at this time Dreiser is in danger of seeming drabber than ever," he declares *An American Tragedy* to be unworthy of being described as a tragedy. It is merely "pathos," because tragedy requires more than "naive social determinism."<sup>16</sup>

The critics who have analyzed Dreiser's works without condescension and with a feel for their complexity as serious works of art with a deep moral significance are few and far between. Although I am very thankful for the current "Dreiser surge"<sup>17</sup> and for the editorial work of scholars like Westlake, Riggio, Pizer, West, Hakutani and Nostwich, providing us with hitherto unpublished primary texts and scholarly introductions and commentaries to them, we also need work that will reevaluate Dreiser as a well-read, well-informed, and highly self-conscious artist who achieved his effects because he sought them and worked very hard to get them right. We need work that will not shy away from Dreiser's political radicalism, will not present him as a social Darwinist with a soft heart. And we need work that will take cognizance of Dreiser's proto-feminism and his participation in anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles. This is not to say that Dreiser was an angel. It is hard to comprehend that the same man who participated in anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles also expressed deeply anti-Semitic and xenophobic attitudes. Nonetheless, he is way ahead of his contemporaries such as H. L. Mencken insofar as he admitted his anti-Semitism and was willing to work on the problem.

As an Indian woman who began work on Dreiser in the late seventies, I was appalled by the tone of many American critics writing on Dreiser. Their "homage," I felt, was always half-hearted. And their eagerness to discount his moral vision, his yearning for a juster society, for a new deal for the "under-dog," I could only explain to myself as a byproduct of the Cold War.

Despite such hostility on the part of the academic establishment, and despite his banishment from the canon, readers like me continue to discover Dreiser. I wish that this discovery had happened a lot earlier in my life. And I wish that my alma maters, both in Indian and Canada, had been less hostile toward Dreiser. For I feel that had to work against the current as I pursued my research on Dreiser, as I learned to say "no" to the interpretations of the big-name American critics.

As a feminist Americanist from India, I would like to tell you that Dreiser is one of the best writers the United States has produced. And if there has to be an American canon, then he deserves to be in it. And if we have to choose the one novel that should be in the canon, I would like it to be *Sister Carrie*. That is because it reads like a contemporary novel even though it was written ninety years ago. And the responses of non-academic readers such as my father and my undergraduate students suggest to me that its fictional world is highly accessible to late twentieth-century readers.

A novel, of course, invites many levels of reading, and some aspects of *Sister Carrie* can only be appreciated if we know the context. For example, I recently discovered that there was a famous madam in Chicago in the 1890's with the name of Carrie Watson. W. T. Stead's 1893 book, *If Christ Came to Chicago*, describes her and her profession in a way that makes one even more appreciative of Dreiser's understanding of women's economic plight in a patriarchal, capitalist society:

Another typical scarlet woman of Chicago is Carrie Watson, whose brownstone house in Clark Street has long been one of the scandals of Chicago. ... Prostitution is to her the natural result of poverty on the part of the woman and of passion on the part of the man. She regards the question from the economic standpoint. Morals no more enter into her business than they do into the business of bulls and bears on the stock exchange. Girl clerks and stenographers, she says, are often unable to earn salaries to keep them in clothes, to say nothing of the numberless relations who are often dependent upon their labor for a livelihood. If they have youth, health, and good looks, they can realize these assets at a higher price down Clark Street or on Fourth Avenue than at any other place in the city. Women who are desperate go to Carrie Watson and her class as men go to the gaming hall in the hope of recouping their fortunes.<sup>18</sup>

*Sister Carrie's* contribution to American literature is in the introduction of the gendered subject as an economic player, in opposition to the dominant cultural discourses which insisted on

portraying women only as prenuptial virtuous women, seduced virtuous women on the verge of suicide, sacrificial virtuous wives or sweethearts, and the widowed mothers of go-getting, virtuous boys. *Sister Carrie* unmask the hypocrisy of these discourses of virtue by portraying women as poverty-stricken employment seekers and the meager choices available to them. Its ironic force becomes even more acute if we know that middle class moral reformers of the time, both men and women, tried to get prostitutes off their sinful course by offering them the wages of domestic workers, a proposal which did not sit well with those moral well-being it so solicitously proposed to look after because of the big fall in take-home pay it would have implied.<sup>19</sup>

*Sister Carrie* did not mince any words when pointing out the difference between the wages of virtue and the wages of sin. "Honest labour," the narrative voice informs us in the last paragraph of the novel, is "unremunerative" (368), an understatement whose irony emanates from the entire flow of the narrative up to that point: from our memories of the encounter between Carrie and her former workmate, the Street Car workers' strike, and the "Curious Shifts of the Poor" chapter.

Dreiser critics turn away from the obvious when they ignore the narrator's guiding hand and debate whether Carrie and Hurstwood are to be seen as free moral agents who are responsible for their individual fate. Now that postmodern thought has finished off with the sovereign, centered subject of humanism and replaced it with the fragmented, ideologically interpellated, decentered subject, Dreiser's notion of the self at the mercy of the environment and unconscious drives should be more acceptable. However, a recent book tells us that Dreiser wants to suggest that "Hurstwood has not done his best to turn the tide. . . . Such elements as environment and heredity are not to blame for his downfall: he himself is to blame."<sup>20</sup> Such a judgment implies that the workers who get laid off in their forties and fifties because of the Maquiladora plan are themselves to blame if they can't find new jobs. I recommend that such critics go see Michael Moore's film *Roger and Me*, which is about the unemployed workers of the closed-up General Motors plant in Flint, Michigan.

Hurstwood's portrayal is one of the rare portrayals in American or any other major literature of the desperation of joblessness at midlife. And the specter of joblessness in one's

forties, the fate of Hurstwood, is one of the most common realities in a world dominated by multinational corporations and global assembly lines. And so is the specter of sustaining illness and injury without health insurance.

Hurstwood's final descent on the slope of misfortune begins when he injures himself on the job while trying to lift a heavy box. Then he goes out on an errand and catches a cold because of his thin clothing and leaky shoes. There is nothing metaphysical about these misfortunes. The critics who shy away from the causes of these material conditions in the name of free will and individual responsibility are the social Darwinists, not Dreiser.

Ill-dressed and sickly-looking homeless people accosting the passersby are a common sight in downtown Toronto. Sometimes the newspapers carry the story of one of them freezing to death in the winter. My encounters with these unfortunate discards of Canadian society are permanently colored by Dreiser's portrayal of them: "There was a face in the thick of the collection which was as white as drained veal. There was another red as brick. Some came with thin, rounded shoulders, others with wooden legs, still others with frames so lean that clothes only flapped about them. There were great ears, swollen noses, thick lips, and above all, red, blood-shot eyes. Not a normal, healthy face in the whole mass; not a straight figure; not a straightforward, steady glance" (366).

I do not buy Elias's, or any other major Dreiser critic's, claim that Dreiser was content to be a passive "spectator" of the American scene. My Dreiser is the visionary Dreiser who wanted to do his part in bringing about a better world, the one who believed that "Nothing is good that will not benefit the majority; nothing true that will not answer as well for many as for one; nothing just that will not equalize the burdens, the sorrows and the pleasures of life."<sup>21</sup> While reading the recently published Dreiser-Mencken correspondence, I was once again gripped by the uncanny relevance of Dreiser's words for our own times. I would like to close with them:

[I]f there is any reason for saving humanity surely it should be that of starving and murdering it. *No life of any kind*, in my humble opinion, is better than that. For I

do not believe in slavery or starvation. For if, with all that we know through modern science, . . . we cannot do better by the average man that I saw in Russian (sic) in 1927 . . . also in England . . . and Spain, France and Belgium, then I think humanity had better be allowed to pass. For I have pity. And pity suggests that no humanity at all is better than what I have seen here and there,—many fractions of the United States included.<sup>22</sup>

As our environment decays, as we talk about the possibility of total extinction, as millions of human beings, in all the three worlds, suffer physical deprivations in a world of plenty, it becomes urgent that we grapple with the grim world Dreiser portrayed in *Sister Carrie*. Not hopelessly, but to change it. That is what, I know, Dreiser wanted us to do.

<sup>1</sup>The image of the beckoning ambassador skillfully conveys Dreiser's views about the power of the external environment in shaping our subjectivity. See subtitles of Chapters VIII, X, XII, XIII, and XXVI. *Sister Carrie: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, Sources, Criticism*, ed. Donald Pizer (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970).

<sup>2</sup>For example, in Ama Ata Aidoo's play, *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, Esi, a Kenyan woman, upon being informed that her son has married an American, says: "We always hear of other women's sons going to the white man's country. Why should my own go and marry a white woman?" It takes several minutes for her son, Ato, to explain to her that America "is not a white man's country." Aidoo, *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965; Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1987), 17-18.

<sup>3</sup>I did find a handful of books, both anthologies and monographs, that deal with writers not represented in the Indian canon of American literature (one of them is on Dreiser, published in 1974). However, none of them commented on the construction of the canon or on the evaluative criteria. For example, most of the contributors to the anthology on Steinbeck kept reiterating that "Steinbeck concerns himself not with a local or sociological problem, but with one that is perpetual, universal, and human." Naresh Chandra, "Steinbeck's *The Winter of Our Discontent*: Continuity of a Theme," in *Indian Response to Steinbeck: Essays Presented to Professor Warren G. French*, ed. R. K. Sharma (Jaipur: Rachana Prakashan, 1986), 292.

<sup>4</sup>D. V. K. Raghavacharyulu, "The Search for Literary Identity," in *Indian Essays in American Literature: Papers in Honour of Robert E. Spiller*, ed. Sujit Mukherjee and D. V. K. Raghavach-

aryulu (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1969), 15.

<sup>5</sup>Sisirkuma Ghose, "American Literature: Partly an Indian View," in *Indian Essays in American Literature*, 4, 9.

<sup>6</sup>Raghavacharyulu, 16.

<sup>7</sup>Raghavacharyulu, 15.

<sup>8</sup>P. S. Shastri, "One Approach to O'Neill," in *Indian Essays in American Literature*, 57.

<sup>9</sup>Raghavacharyulu, 20, 21.

<sup>10</sup>Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), "Preface."

<sup>11</sup>Arun Mukherjee, *Towards and Aesthetic of Opposition: Essays on Literature, Criticism and Cultural Imperialism* (Stratford, Ont.: Williams Wallace, 1988), "Introduction," 4-8.

<sup>12</sup>Robert H. Elias, *Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature* (emended ed.; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), "From the Preface of 1948," vii.

<sup>13</sup>F. O. Matthiessen, *Theodore Dreiser* (Scranton, PA: William Sloane Associates, 1951), 60.

<sup>14</sup>Robert Penn Warren, *Homage to Theodore Dreiser* (New York: Random House, 1971), 32.

<sup>15</sup>Harold Bloom, "Introduction," in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), 1, 2.

<sup>16</sup>Philip L. Gerber, "The Dreiser Surge," *Review 10* (1988): 85-96.

<sup>17</sup>W. T. Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1893). Excerpted in *Broken Image: Foreign Critiques of America*, ed. Gerald Emanuel Stearn (New York: Random House, 1972), 140.

<sup>18</sup>Nancy A. Hewitt, "Beyond the Search for Sisterhood: American Women's History of the 1980's," *Social History*, 10.3 (1985): 313.

<sup>19</sup>Yoshinobu Hakutani, *Young Dreiser: A Critical Study* (Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980), 188.

<sup>20</sup>Elias, Chapter V, "Spectator," 88-102.

<sup>21</sup>Quoted by Elias, p. 92. Elias's reference is to *Ev'ry Month* II (September 1896): 7, but that does not seem to be correct. The quotation, if we go by Pizer's *Theodore Dreiser: A Selection of Uncollected Prose* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1977), does not appear in that month's "Reflections."

<sup>22</sup>Letter to Mencken, March 27, 1943. *Dreiser-Mencken Letters: The Correspondence of Theodore Dreiser and H. L. Mencken*, Volume 2, ed. Thomas P. Riggio (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 689.

# Dreiser's Romantic Tendencies

Yoshinobu Hakutani

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. . . The difficulty in interpreting Dreiser's fiction has partly risen from the definition of the term "naturalism." A character, according to the doctrine, is a product of the forces over which he or she has no control. The two most important sources of influence are one's heredity and one's environment. Some of our earlier critics, however, have used the term a bit loosely in applying it to American fiction, and to Dreiser in particular. . . .

While American literature has produced some excellent naturalistic novels, many of the novels called "naturalistic" were naturalistic in a rather limited sense. Given a unique culture and history, the naturalistic philosophy has proved uncongenial, in the main, to the American temperament. . . . The American novelist in general tries to uphold the stature of the individual and to endow the character with autonomy and responsibility.

This spirit of individualism appears in various forms of aspiration. It can be one's pursuit of happiness, one's realization of a dream, one's quest for freedom and independence. . . . If romantics like Emerson and Whitman exalted man to the level of divinity, the American naturalists, by challenging the strictures of society, reaffirmed human aspirations.

Thanks to the University of Pennsylvania edition of *Sister Carrie*, we are allowed to have a clearer understanding of the making of a naturalistic and romantic novel, . . . reveal[ing]

once and for all that Dreiser, by accepting Arthur Henry's advice for substantial block cuts, intended to tell a far less grim story of Hurstwood and, in turn, romanticize Carrie's rise to stardom.

. . . What makes Dreiser less realistic in his portrayal of characters than he is supposed to be is his expression compassion, as F. O. Matthiessen, Robert Elias, and Philip Gerber have amply demonstrated. . . . As Dreiser was drawn to Carrie's personal sentiments, he tried to stave off whatever influences society might have exerted upon Carrie. The technique he used in such a story was to render her portrait, in part, in symbolic or mythic terms, as shown from the beginning of the Story. In Chapter I, "The Magnet Attractive: A Waif Amid Forces," Carrie is delineated: "A half-equipped little knight she was, venturing to reconnoiter the mysterious city and dream wild dreams of some vague, far-off supremacy." A corollary tendency of this method is that as Dreiser stresses the mythic qualities in his portrayal, he minimizes the impact of realistic details upon the character. Dreiser's strategy is thus hardly unique.

Dreiser's reference to the specific details indicating the time, place, and context of Carrie's travel to Chicago is thus excised. Instead, Dreiser resumes his tale of the small town girl's pilgrimage to a big city: "When a girl leaves her home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtues and becomes worse" (*SC* 1900, p. 2). Whether such a passage is retained to evoke a myth of success or to ignore the details that would otherwise make Carrie's story too realistic, the significance of this shift has more to do with the structure of the novel than the style of the writing.

That Dreiser at the outset of the story had his eye mostly on the innocent feelings of his heroine rather than on her immediate surroundings sets a distinct pattern of portrayal for the rest of the story. Whenever the plot veers too closely to the social and realistic material, there emerges a conscious effort to return to the portrayal of the individual sentiments. In fact, Carrie in the original manuscript was not so innocent and naive as she appears to be in the novel. Deleted from the 1900 edition are the passages which specifically mentioned the sexual exploitation rampant in Chicago. In her struggle to land a job she

ran into a prospective employer, "a most sensual-faced individual" (SC 1981, p. 27), whose interview implied that she would be hired if she became his mistress. As her affair with Drouet faded away, she began to think seriously about obtaining another job with a fake crayon-portrait establishment called the "Great American Art Company," whose manager "was nevertheless anxious to get near him some girl of good looks and weak principles on whom he might practice his art of seduction" (SC 1981, p. 257). . . .

The original version of *Sister Carrie* was full of the economic references which find no place in the novel. Dreiser originally indicated, for example, that the four dollar weekly rent Carrie paid her sister and her husband would pay for their monthly rent, "seventeen dollars." With the savings, Hanson could make an investment in the "two lots which were valued at two hundred dollars each, far out on the West Side" (SC 1891, p. 13). Economic references made later in the story, when Hurstwood was out of work and winter arrived in New York, also served as crucial detail and verisimilitude to make *Sister Carrie* a truly realistic novel. . . .

Such references aside, the original manuscript of the novel contained numerous allusions to the social status of an individual or a group of people. By contrast, Dreiser in the novel is less conscious of one's social class; his characterization is more personal and individualistic. Interestingly enough, Dreiser said of Henry James: "I would reject most of James as too narrowly and thinly class-conscious." It is not surprising, then, that Dreiser omitted some allusions to one's class-consciousness which would have detracted from expressing one's personal feelings.

When Carrie in Chicago played on an amateur stage the role of Laura, a girl rescued off the streets and raised by a New York society woman, the role, Dreiser wrote, "affected Carrie deeply. It reminded her somehow of her own state. She caught the infection of sorrow, sympathized with it wholly and consequently mastered it easily." When a suitor from the upper class found out Laura's background, Dreiser commented with a touch of satire: "Society would not brook a marriage with so low a creature." . . . In the 1900 edition, these social and political references are either toned down or eliminated entirely.

The introduction of a young, innocent girl as a

"half-equipped little knight" (SC 1900, p. 3) helps us to understand what Dreiser has in mind. Dreiser's conception of his heroine is clearly sentimental and idealistic. The romance, then, begins on one summer afternoon in 1889, when Carrie from a small town in Wisconsin goes to Chicago aboard a train. In the rest of her journey, her battle of life, the clashes of her dreams against the sordid reality, is repeated. . . .

Carrie's rise, furthermore, indicates a neat pattern formulated by her perennial instincts craving for better things. Apparently, the incidental forces controlling life command that, whatever achievement one makes, he or she will be always dissatisfied. One's discontentment, the inevitable result of one's longing, is nevertheless a symptom of the romantic sensibility. This, then, is true of Carrie. To her, the boys trying to attract her attention at the factory appear glaringly inferior to Drouet. When he introduces her to Hurstwood, she instinctively feels that Hurstwood belongs to a higher class of men. She is attracted to Hurstwood more strongly than to Drouet because Hurstwood is more intelligent than Drouet and because Hurstwood, in Dreiser's words, "paid that peculiar deference to women which every member of the sex appreciates" (SC 1900, p. 106). . . . Dreiser thus makes of his realism a means of restoring to the novel some of the dramatic mysteries and colorful events that used to be incorporated into a romance. No wonder he has a penchant for mythic and analogic expressions as he calls Carrie "a knight" or a man "a wisp in the wind." . . .

Dreiser's purpose of writing was not so much to delve into the realm of social criticism as to dramatize the psychology of human behavior. In contemplating Hurstwood's action, Dreiser is more impressed by accidental and mysterious phenomena than he is by the moral sanctions society imposes upon the individual. Hurstwood's story contains as many elements of romance as Carrie's, for the very abstractness and profundity of romance allows it to formulate human truths of the heart rather than moral truths of the society. For Hurstwood, the difference between this young, pretty, innocent girl and his petty, vain, nagging wife becomes equally obvious. Mrs. Hurstwood is a sophisticated woman; she is well informed in the social mores and well polished in her manners. When he becomes acquainted with Carrie, he is enjoying the zenith of his career. His position is respected in his circle, and economically

he belongs to the class just below that of the luxuriously rich. At the age of forty, his flight from such an environment is doomed from the beginning. But, swayed by his blind infatuation with the girl, he commits a blunder. Hurstwood's action is always motivated by adventure, not by the kind of planning an ordinary businessman would contemplate.

. . . Having come to know Hurstwood and Carrie in the circumstances of their extraordinary lives, we are able to feel for them as their romance unfolds. They thus have an existence apart from the victims that they have become. As Hurstwood's fortune falls Carrie's rises. As a myth of success, however, the story must shift its focus from Hurstwood to Carrie. Dreiser, then, dramatically portrays her successes on the stage, indicating her rapidly rising reputation throughout the country. Far from Hurstwood's final scene in the manuscript version, where he turns the gas on in the room to end his misery, the final scene of the novel suggests a hopeful attitude Carrie takes toward life.

The rearrangement of such a grim scene as Hurstwood's suicide suggests that one's striving for the ideal, despite one's occasional misfortune, is the keynote of *Sister Carrie*. And this call for the ideal is the essential motivation of each character in the novel. Even if Dreiser accepts the world as it is and things as they are, he could still assert in the end: "Not evil, but longing for that which is better, more often directs the steps of erring. Not evil, but goodness more often allures the feeling mind unused to reason" (SC 1900, p. 555). Interestingly, the 1900 edition of the novel ends with this often quoted passage in which Dreiser tells his heroine: "Oh, Carrie, Carrie! Oh, blind strivings of the human heart! Onward, onward, it saith, and where beauty leads, there it follows. . . . in your rocking-chair, by your window, shall you dream much happiness as you may never feel" (557). Dreiser finally sees Carrie in her famous rocking chair as she broods over the mystery of life, just as he did in his own life, without understanding anything more clearly than the day she first left home for Chicago. This is *not* so hopeless a situation a young girl like Carrie must face in life as it appears. Because Carrie at the end of the story is not completely happy, she ponders a possible relationship with Ames, an intellectual, who recommends that she read Balzac's novels. But banishing Ames from her further thoughts suggest her realization that happiness is always elusive and that as her stan-

dards will become higher, she will be less satisfied in life. This recognition, which underlies Dreiser's concept of romance, also accounts for Carrie's sensibility.

That *Sister Carrie* (1900) contains more elements of romance than naturalistic criticism has accorded a Dreiserian novel is scarcely unique in American fiction. This type of fiction derived from the two separate streams of fiction in America: the romance and the novel. The romantic fiction is characterized by authorial implicitness, ambiguity, and sentimentality, while the realistic fiction is written with authorial explicitness, structural clarity, and social detail. The two versions of *Sister Carrie* suggest that Dreiser himself was ambivalent in presenting this story to the public in 1900. Although it is not exactly true that the 1900 version is a pure romance whereas the 1981 edition is a realistic and naturalistic novel, it is interesting to recognize how clearly this dualism in American fiction emerges in the story of *Sister Carrie*.

## News and Notes

With this issue, *DS* welcomes two new members to its editorial staff. Dr. David Vancil, Head of Rare Books and Special Collections at Indiana State University's Cunningham Library, has agreed to serve in the new position of Associate Editor. Joining Dr. Vancil is Debra Everitt, who is our new Editorial Assistant. *DS* wishes to thank Howard Waltersdorf and Mary Ann Duncan, both of whom left the staff at the beginning of the academic year, for their many years of excellent service as Managing Editor and Editorial Assistant, respectively. . . . *Papers on Language and Literature* will publish a special issue on Dreiser in Spring 1991. Guest Editor James West writes that the issue will include the text of *The "Rake"*, never before published, and will also have articles on the *Tragedy*, *The Financier*, *Twelve Men*, the Soviet diaries, Dreiser's copy of *McTeague*, the dummy of *The Hand of the Potter*, Dreiser's last days before death, and his handwriting. . . . Also in the spring of 1991 *Sister Carrie* will be presented on stage for the first time by The People's Light & Theatre Company in Malvern, PA. Louis Lippa's two-part adaptation will be enacted in more than 5 1/2 hours and 92 scenes and features 250 characters in 170 costumes. See the enclosed flyer for further information. . . . Finally, an organizational meeting of a Dreiser Society will be held in May at the ALA convention in Washington, DC. Miriam Gogol will be sending *DS* subscribers information on plans for the meeting and the Society in March 1991.

## The Journey Completed

*Theodore Dreiser: An American Journey: 1908-1945*, by Richard Lingeman. Vol. 2 of a two-volume biography. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, c1990. 544 pp. \$39.95.

In the spring 1986 issue of *Dreiser Studies*, Richard Dowell reviewed enthusiastically the first volume of Richard Lingeman's Dreiser biography, subtitled *At the Gates of the City: 1871-1907*. Dowell found both color and drama, noting that Lingeman's access to materials unavailable to W. A. Swanberg, whose 1965 biography, *Dreiser*, had been the definitive full treatment of Dreiser's literary life, allowed Lingeman to "flesh out" matters previously treated only sketchily. As an example, Dowell mentioned Lingeman's lengthy treatment of Dreiser's courtship of his first wife, Jug.

Volume two of the biography, *An American Journey*, reveals a biographer holding steadfast to his previous interpretation of Dreiser as a man whose relationship with his mother dominated his preoccupations both as a writer and as a man. Also in this second volume, Dreiser's need to come to terms with and, in my view, forgive his father for a failure both as a provider and as a role model emerges. Against these formative forces, the story of Dreiser struggling with with his own weaknesses, drives, and fears unfolds dramatically, revealing how his vision transformed his personal life into a record into which any reader may look and see some aspect of truth.

Thus the importance of Sarah Dreiser's unquestioning love, a quality that Dreiser sought in women and that led him to reject them as their hero worship turned into need, remains a constant theme throughout the second volume. The father remains a mysterious wisp until about 30 pages before the end of the text, when Lingeman presents a picture of Dreiser listening to his brother Ed singing a German folk song and then "speaking sympathetically" of him (449).

Portraying a psychically crippled Dreiser who somehow uses these weaknesses as a window into the souls of fellow humans, whom he routinely views as having been beaten down by the same kind of harsh system that destroyed his father and made his mother the center of the family, Lingeman transforms the writer into a kind of hero of the ordinary. Almost in *bas relief*, Dreiser's literary output becomes a kind of triumph over personal depression and the bleakness of a vapid existence through its portrayal of characters who in their suffering come to realize aspects, even if unknowingly, of the human condition that they demonstrate to the reader.

By underscoring Dreiser's weaknesses, Lingeman has made Dreiser that much more interesting to readers unschooled in criticism. Lingeman orchestrates the life of Dreiser, through his choice of his incidents and his interpretation of them, so that Dreiser emerges as a great, though flawed person whose quest both for an understanding of human frailties and for their correction emerges as a triumph of the spirit and of literature. This larger intellectual drama is a subtext that permeates the second volume of biography.

Both brutally honest and masterfully constructed, Lingeman's biography, written in the modern mode that relies on the biographer's strengths as much as the inherent interest of his story, must suffer slightly in a comparison between its two volumes. Yet, even after cutting, *An American Journey: 1908-1945* still stands 66 pages longer than the first volume. An unenviable task for a biographer, Lingeman had to treat 15 more years in volume two than in volume one.

Reading the second volume as a continuation of the first, I found the second volume, *An American Journey: 1908-1945*, to be a great success. The biographer places Dreiser firmly in his milieu with a remarkable cast of associates, acquaintances, friends, and lovers passing through the great realist's life. Balanced against the vista of his literary and public life is Dreiser's private existence both with its demons of loneliness and depression and of drink. As for his treatment of Dreiser's achievements, there can be little doubt in the measure Lingeman takes of Theodore Dreiser:

He was the most "American" of novelists. His hungry curiosity probed the nooks and crannies of the national life, as he sought to perform what he saw as his mission—understanding a large, youthful, dynamic country that had no deep roots in the past and that was in a perpetual state of change and becoming. He retained a deep compassion for the voiceless mass of individuals in this land; their tawdry dreams and desires had for him the beauty of prayers. (482)

Undoubtedly Lingeman's treatment must be credited with helping to return Dreiser more fully into the American consciousness. His able biography provides a relevant personal context to accompany the intensified scholarly treatment Dreiser's work is currently experiencing.

—David Vancil  
Indiana State University

## BACK ISSUE AVAILABILITY

While supplies last, back issues of *The Dreiser Newsletter* and *Dreiser Studies* will be sold at \$2.00 per issue in North America. Orders from elsewhere should include the required additional postage. Vols. 6.2 and 7.1 are no longer available.

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